



Albert Wohlstetter

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In his [Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) on November 7, 1985, President [Ronald Reagan](#) said:

"**Albert Wohlstetter** is a brilliant man with enormous strength of character. His intellectual integrity is renowned, and his analytical standards have been increasingly and unceasingly rigorous. He's been a steady hand in an uncertain time. His understanding on many levels has been indispensable to the well-being of the free world. In these last 30 years, Albert has been influential in helping to design and deploy our strategic forces -- an awesome task. He's sought ways to make our forces safer from attack, less destructive, and thereby less dangerous to us all. Many of the basic concepts and requirements for deterrence in the nuclear age -- analysis on which we've operated -- can be traced to this outstanding individual. And his work on the problem of **nuclear proliferation** gave us the insight we needed to better curb the irresponsible flow of sensitive material and technology.

"Albert has always argued that in the nuclear age technological advances can, if properly understood and applied, make things better; but his point, and [that of his wife,] [Roberta Wohlstetter](#)'s, has been a deeper one than that. He has shown us that we have to create choices and, then, exercise them. The Wohlstetters have created choices for our society where others saw none. They've taught us that there is an escape from fatalism."



Wohlstetter on "Deploying Nuclear Forces"

In the paper "From Testing to Deploying Nuclear Forces. The Hard Choices Facing India and Pakistan," Gregory S. Jones (University of Chicago) [writes](#) that "A fully deployed nuclear force must meet many requirements to ensure that it is capable of fulfilling the deterrence function assigned to it without causing other undue risks. These requirements were first delineated by Albert Wohlstetter in his seminal article, 'The Delicate Balance of Terror.' Although the origins of these requirements were in the context of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, Wohlstetter made it clear that the requirements applied to any nuclear power and not just the two superpowers.

Jones, based on [RAND Corporation](#) documents (see below) written by Dr. Wohlstetter, cites eight requirements posited by him: "A central requirement is that a nuclear force should be able to survive a first strike designed to prevent the force from striking back. Wohlstetter had seen how difficult it was for the United States to achieve this objective against the relatively small Soviet nuclear force in the 1950s, which was one of the main reasons he considered the balance of terror 'delicate.' He believed that meeting this requirement would be even harder in an environment of many nuclear powers where the capabilities of these powers would vary greatly."

The second requirement is that "the delivery systems must be able to reach their targets and to penetrate defenses on their way to the target."

The third is that "the force should have a low risk of physical accidents, a problem even the United States has encountered." As Jones points out, "Aircraft carrying **nuclear weapons** have crashed."

The fourth is that "the nuclear weapons should be safe against theft or unauthorized use [originating] ... from either external or internal sources."

The fifth is that "the force should have a low risk of mistaken use by authorized persons."

The sixth is that "the command authorities must survive any first strike, be able to make the decision to retaliate, and be able to communicate this decision to the surviving nuclear forces."

The seventh is that "the nuclear forces should be capable of a number of response options."

And the final, the eighth requirement, is that "the force must be procured and operated at a reasonable cost. What is 'reasonable' is relative, depending on the defense spending in any particular country."

- Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 2, January 1959. A slightly different version was published as P-1472, RAND, December 1958.
- Wohlstetter, "Nuclear Sharing: NATO and the N+1 Country," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 3, April 1961.
- Wohlstetter, et al., in: "Selection and Use of Strategic Air Bases, RAND, R-266, April 2, 1954; "Protecting U.S. Power to Strike Back in the 1950s and 1960s, RAND, R-290, September 1, 1956; and "Defending a Strategic Force After 1960," RAND, D-2270, February 1, 1954.

During a May 9, 2003 *Vanity Fair* interview by Sam Tannenhause, [Paul Dundes Wolfowitz](#) talked about Albert Wohlstetter (Source: [Defense Link News](#)):

Q: Let me ask about one other [inaudible], and that's Albert Wohlstetter. A couple of people, believe me, who are not [inaudible] at all, say that Wohlstetter was a far-sighted military strategist whose notions have been about low yield nuclear weapons that we're hearing about today, and different ways of fighting wars. It doesn't have to be an all or nothing, zero sum, no mutually assured destruction. Are there any notions like that on where the military is today or how you look at --

Wolfowitz: Wohlstetter is a much more relevant figure and it's interesting too, by the way, that the same fellow who, or one of the same fellows who discovered the Straussian Conspiracy kind of throws Wohlstetter in as a Straussian when Wohlstetter was actually philosophically a student of [Willard Van Orman Quine](#) [(1908-2000)].

[...]

Wolfowitz: Exactly. If there was anything anathema to [Leo Strauss](#) it was analytical philosophy. ... And Wohlstetter was somebody who really just almost painfully resisted being labeled even as to political party. He was so insistent on ascertaining the facts. He had a very fact-based approach to policy. It's very impressive. And indeed, I was his student and often identified as such, and it occasionally troubled me just a little bit that I thought, well, maybe he was also associated with these sort of cold-blooded systems analysts who kind of seemed to leave the moral piece of politics and strategy as though it wasn't part of the equation.

It was terrifically gratifying to me as I got to know him better, to realize that there were intensely moral considerations in the way he approached these issues. Most dramatically in his deep concern about the fate of Bosnia in his late years.

But to come back to sort of more concretely, I mean here's something that I think is quite important, quite relevant. Albert Wohlstetter was one of the first people, most influential people, to understand what a dramatic difference it would make to have accurate weapons. And that in particular what he was really interested in was the ability, two things. Number one, to be able to use conventional weapons in ways that people, that only nuclear weapons could be used, to be able to get out of the nuclear mindset kind of things.

But secondly and importantly, to be able to avoid unnecessary loss of innocent life in war. And in

fact there's a fairly seminal document that was done under [Fred C. Ikle](#) when he was Under Secretary of Defense for Policy called *Discriminate Deterrence* which may be interesting to know if you can find it on the internet. As I recall, even at the time, the State Department didn't like it because for some reason or other it offended some of our allies.

[...]

But going back much earlier, Albert, starting in '73 or '74 put together something called the New Alternative Workshop or New Alternative Panel. I think it was Workshop. To look at the implications of new technology. But the ones that interested him the most were the ones that promised great improvements in accuracy. And as a result he was the first intellectual figure to recognize that the Tomahawk cruise missile which was being developed by the Navy primarily as a nuclear delivery system, was much more significant as a conventional delivery system because it could give you very accurate weapons with ranges of what we have now, 600 miles or more.

If it hadn't been for Albert, I believe the Tomahawk cruise missile would have been traded away in the SALT II talks in 1976. ...

[...]

So it was a matter of considerable personal satisfaction to watch those missiles turning right angle corners in the Gulf War in 1991 and demonstrating that this stuff really could do what Albert Wohlstetter had envisioned 15 years before it might be able to do.

It's also an interesting case I think, without wanting to suggest that there's anything unintelligent about the military, it's too easy to misinterpret this comment. I mean there are very smart people trying very hard to do the right thing, but what's involved here is a tradeoff between a very expensive system that might some day be accurate, against things that are available here and now and that are much cheaper, and they may not be accurate but they seem to "do the job".

[...]

But if you wanted to understand Albert Wohlstetter you've got to understand how somebody can perceive that a seemingly cold technical fact like this fact about accuracy translates into a whole transformation of strategy and politics.

That had a similar impact in the 1950s when he was asked to look at, by the Air Force, at what's the most cost-effective way to base our bomber force and came out of that with the observation which is like a blinding flash of the obvious but no one had noticed it before then, that the real issue isn't what's cost effective, the real issue is how do you build a bomber force that's not vulnerable to a first strike by the other side?

[...]

Q: Does that also raise a question then if you're looking at leader who truly is brutal, [inaudible], raising that question, and also maybe someone who doesn't necessarily think the way you do. I know Wohlstetter had this phrase, I think he called it Western preferred Soviet strategy.

Wolfowitz: Exactly. It's probably the second greatest source of intelligence error is mirror imaging. I mean I think the greatest mistake is assuming that people will behave, well it's a version of mirror imaging, I guess. People will be rational according to our definition of what is rational.

Dr. Albert Wohlstetter's name has been linked with those of a number of [neoconservatives](#) affiliated with the [Bush administration](#) and the [Department of Defense](#), the [University of Chicago](#), as well as appearing to share other common threads with Paul Dundes Wolfowitz, [Richard N. Perle](#), [Donald Rumsfeld](#), [Ahmed Chalabi](#), [William Kristol](#), and [Irving Kristol](#) .

- According to the article [Neo-Conservative Ascendancy in the George W. Bush Administration](#) [✉](#), Joan Wohlstetter introduced her classmate Richard N. Perle to her father, Albert Wohlstetter. Wohlstetter, in turn, "helped Perle and Paul Dundes Wolfowitz get their

- start in Washington. ... According to Perle, he and Wolfowitz were introduced to each other by Wolfstetter when he thought they could work together in 1969 on the debate taking shape in the Senate over the ballistic missile defense." (Note: Article cites "Alfred Wohlstetter".)
- In 1972, Wolfowitz attained his doctoral degree from the University of Chicago, where "he is cared for by professor Albert Wohlstetter, [who, later during] the Gulf War [has] still another large role will play." [1] [original German](#) (Note: Article cites "Alfred Wohlstetter".)
 - Jim Lobe writes in his March 9, 2003 article [Family ties connect US right, Zionists](#) that "Another key Irving Kristol disciple has been Richard Perle, the influential and ultra-hawkish chairman of Donald Rumsfeld's [Defense Policy Board](#), whose main office is at [American Enterprise Institute](#) (AEI), where the [Project for the New American Century](#) (PNAC) and William Kristol are also based. His [Perle's] spouse is the daughter [Joan] of his teacher at the University of Chicago, another neo-con hero and strategic thinker who also favoured invading [Iraq](#), the late Albert Wohlstetter, for whom the AEI conference centre is named. Wohlstetter also taught Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz." (Note: Article cites "Alfred Wohlstetter". Moreover, this article incorrectly identifies Richard Perle's spouse as Wohlstetter's daughter, Joan. The New York Times made similar error, which it [corrected](#).)
 - "Jewish and from a family of teachers, Wolfowitz is for his part a brilliant product of East Coast universities. He has studied with two of the most eminent professors of the 1960s. [Allan Bloom](#), the discipline of the German-Jewish philosopher, Leo Strauss, and Albert Wohlstetter, professor of mathematics and a specialist in military strategy. These two names would end up counting. The neoconservatives have placed themselves under the tutelary shadow of the strategist and the philosopher." [2]
 - "What makes Ahmed Chalabi so attractive to the Washington war party? Most importantly, he's a co-thinker: a mathematician trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Chicago and a banker (who years ago hit it off with Albert Wohlstetter, the theorist who was a godfather of the neoconservative movement), a fellow mathematician and a University of Chicago strategist. In 1985, Wohlstetter (who died in 1997) introduced Chalabi to Perle, then the undersecretary of defense for international-security policy under President Reagan and one of Wohlstetter's leading acolytes. The two have been close ever since. In early October, Perle and Chalabi shared a podium at an American Enterprise Institute conference called 'The Day After: Planning for a Post-Saddam Iraq,' which was held, appropriately enough, in AEI's 12th-floor [Wohlstetter Conference Center](#). 'The [Iraqi National Congress](#) has been the philosophical voice of free [Iraq](#) for a dozen years,' Perle told" Robert Dreyfuss. [The American Prospect](#), November 18, 2002
 - An August 4, 2003, special article for the *The Dubya Report*, "[The Prophet of Prevarication and His Disciple](#)", reports that "While at Chicago, Strauss and mathematician Albert Wohlstetter trained a number of students who themselves became, or whose students became important figures in the neoconservative movement. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz studied with Strauss and [Allan Bloom](#), and earned his Ph.D. from the U of C in 1972. William Kristol, chairman of the currently influential conservative advocacy group the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), studied with Strauss student [Harvey Mansfield](#). NSC southwest Asia specialist Zalmay Khalilzad earned his Ph.D. under Wohlstetter in 1979, 10 years after Ahmed Chalabi, the 'man who would be king' of Iraq."
 - The April 2003 [special report](#) "[Zalmay Khalilzad: The Neocons' Bagman To Baghdad](#)" by Issam M. Nashashibi, published by *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, states that "Perle whet his neo-conservative whistle under Albert Wohlstetter, a University of Chicago mathematician who was key in drawing up the Pentagon's strategic and nuclear blueprints during the Cold War. That same Wohlstetter mentored many of the Bush administration's reigning neo-conservatives, including Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, one of the

most pro-Zionist of the so-called [chickenhawks](#), and Zalmay Khalilzad."

- Max Fraad Wolff, in "Neo-conservatism and the politics of paranoia" published June 2003 in "[Red Pepper](#)" [✉](#), writes that "The neo-cons' alliance with Rand Corporation heavyweight Albert Wohlstetter symbolised their entrance into Republican power circles.

"Wohlstetter worked with longtime Rumsfeld ally [Kenneth Adelman](#) and influenced and introduced Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle to each other. Wohlstetter's charge to influence policy through [think tank](#) activity and association with Washington elites offered the neo-cons a potent model. Their struggles against arms reduction facilitated rapid ascension to prominent roles in policy research and implementation.

"Neo-conservatism is defined by Straussian logic, Wohlstetter method and Republican interest. The neo-cons' proximity to power, academic position and media reach are now unrivalled."

"Neo-conservatism has long struggled for the influence it now commands. It seeks to control mortal threats (real or imagined) before destruction is unleashed. The [revolution in military affairs](#) offered by Bush, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz was designed by Wohlstetter and friends at the Rand Institute in the 1970s; the neo-cons waited in the wings ever since. The two Gulf wars, Venezuela and [Afghanistan](#) have been the test phases of a 'new' strategic disposition. The [United Nations](#), [NATO](#), strategic alliances and military assets are being reshuffled to advance US power."

Other SourceWatch Resources

- [Andrew Marshall](#)
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External links

- [Writings of Albert Wohlstetter](#) [✉](#), [RAND Corporation](#).
- [Albert Wohlstetter Dot Com](#) [✉](#), a website that examines the careers and writings of the late Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter.
- [Aspin, Woolsey, Join Center in Honoring Albert Wohlstetter, Winner of 1993 'Freedom Flame'](#) [✉](#), [Center for Security Policy](#), September 21, 1993.
- [Bob Djurdjevic, The Hidden Truth About Gorazde, Bosnia. Fishing for Bodies in the Drina](#) [✉](#), *Truth in Media*, August 1, 1994.
- [Wohlstetter--The Ultimate Pocket-Book Election Issue: Clinton Is Inviting Costly International Conflicts](#) [✉](#), [Center for Security Policy](#), October 2, 1996.
- [Albert Wohlstetter, R.I.P.](#) [✉](#), *Polyconomics*, January 16, 1997.
- [Jude Wanniski, Tribute to Albert Wohlstetter](#) [✉](#), *Voice of America*, January 21, 1997.
- [Marshall Freeman Harris and Stephen Walker, Remembering Albert Wohlstetter](#) [✉](#), *Bosnian Report/Bosnian Institute*, February-May 1997.
- [Jason Vest, Darth Rumsfeld](#) [✉](#), *The American Prospect*, February 26, 2001.
- [Jude Wanniski, The Prince of Darkness](#) [✉](#). Memo To: [Henry Kissinger](#) Re: [Richard Perle](#), *wanniski.com*, September 18, 2001.
- [Jude Wanniski, Fire Paul Wolfowitz.](#) [✉](#) Memo to [Donald Rumsfeld](#) Re: "The Monkeys on your Back", *informationclearinghouse*, October 9, 2001. Memo discusses role of Wohlstetter.
- [Khurram Husain, American Dreams. Intellectual Roots of Neo-conservative Thinking](#) [✉](#) (cache file), *Studien von Zeitfragen*, 2003.
- [Elizabeth Drew, The Neocons in Power](#) [✉](#), *The New York Review of Books*, January 12, 2003.

- Neil Swidey, [The Analyst](#), *Boston Globe*, May 18, 2003: "Albert Wohlstetter". Also [here](#).
- Alain Frachon and Daniel Vernet; translated by Norman Madarasz, [The Strategist and the Philosopher](#), *CounterPunch*, June 2, 2003.
- Robert L. Bartley, [Joining LaRouche In the Fever Swamps. The New York Times and The New Yorker go off the deep end](#), *Opinion Journal*, June 9, 2003.
- Khurram Husain, ["Neocons: The men behind the curtain"](#), *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November/December 2003.
- Tom Barry, [A History of Threat Escalation. Remembering Team B](#), *RightWeb Analysis*, February 12, 2004: "Wohlstetter, who had left his full-time position at RAND to become a professor at the University of Chicago, organized an informal study group that included younger neoconservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz and longtime hawks like [Paul H. Nitze](#)."
- NeoCon Europe [Albert Wohlstetter](#)

Category: [Nuclear PR](#)

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